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SUBJECT: UN VIEWS ON SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Summary

¶1. (SBU) UN DPKO U/SYG Guehenno shared a downbeat report on his recent trip to Afghanistan and the UN perspective on the outcome of the recent Paris Conference in a June 19 meeting with PermReps from key coalition countries. In comparison to his last visit in 2005, Guehenno described a sense of "despondency and uncertainty" in Afghanistan. Although Coalition Forces and Afghan security forces are winning tactical battles, he argued that these accomplishments are not adding up to strategic victory. He said the Afghan people are exhausted from years of conflict, and "collateral damage" and intrusive searches by Coalition Forces means their perception of foreign troops is deteriorating, a point of view he described as widespread, from President Karzai to the average citizen. Guehenno said the Taliban is considered cruel but disciplined whereas the government is perceived to lack discipline and integrity. He stated that efforts to build an army and a police force are progressing well, but overall trust in state institutions has decreased. On a more positive note, Guehenno reported tremendous support from donors and major ISAF players for SRSG Eide, but reiterated the familiar criticism that there is no shared "map" of which donor is doing what where in Afghanistan, and emphasized the need to strengthen the JCMB. He confirmed that elections are a priority for UNAMA.

¶2. (SBU) In a separate meeting June 20, USUN Deputy Political Counselor Molly Phee spoke with the UN Director of the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) Craig Jenness about EAD's assessment of the upcoming elections in Afghanistan. Noting the UN's appointment of elections adviser Margie Cook to the UNAMA team and recent TDY elections support to the mission, Jenness requested consultations with State, USAID and other agencies as appropriate on the margins of an NDU conference on the Afghan elections scheduled for late July. While acknowledging the outstanding legal and logistical issues that need to be tackled, Jenness praised the technical expertise of the Afghans and recommended that the international community manage its expectations. He noted that it is routine for voter turnout to be lower in the second election held after the introduction of democracy. What may be more important, he suggested, is equitable levels of participation by all ethnic groups.

Guehenno Analyzes International Effort in Afghanistan

¶3. (SBU) Following the Paris Conference on Afghanistan, the Canadian PermRep invited DPKO U/SYG Guehenno for breakfast to meet with PermReps, including Amb Khalilzad, from key coalition countries June 19 to discuss his recent visit to Afghanistan. Guehenno opened by comparing his latest trip unfavorably to his last visit in 2005. He said he found a

sense of "despondency and uncertainty." He offered his assessment that tactical military victories have not resulted in a strategic victory. While ISAF and OEF forces clearly take precautions to avoid undue harm to the population, the "finer points" regarding the intent of combat operations are not adequately explained to the population or overshadowed by forceful entries, night patrols and other intrusive activities. The result is a deteriorating perception of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Guehenno said: "I did not meet with a single person in Afghanistan who did not raise this with me as an issue of concern." He suggested that a solution to this growing problem is to encourage greater participation of Afghan security forces. In discussing these issues, Guehenno also said that there was a need to deal with the consequences of the tension between OEF and ISAF, explaining that NATO finds itself having to cope with the effects of OEF operations in its areas.

¶4. (SBU) Turning to the government, Guehenno said efforts to build up the Afghan army and police are going well but overall trust in state institutions is insufficient. Guehenno suggested that the presence of the state in the day-to-day lives of the people remains inadequate. Government performance is uneven, varying from ministry to ministry and province to province. Karzai advisor Popal has good ideas about governance, said Guehenno, but since he is pursuing them through the Presidency rather than implementing them through the ministries it is not clear that they will develop operational legs. Widespread corruption has created a perception that the government does not have discipline or integrity, in contrast to the Taliban, who are perceived to be cruel but disciplined. Guehenno also said that in making appointments, Karzai is perceived to focus too much on an individual's tribal or ethnic affiliation rather than competence.

¶5. (SBU) Guehenno praised the international commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction. However, he stated that a coherent vision across sectors, regions and PRTs is lacking. There is no comprehensive "map" that provides a common picture of the reconstruction effort -- which donor is doing what where. He also raised the disparity in the distribution of resources, reporting for example that one province has \$40 million in available project funding while another has only \$4 million, and lamented the political signal sent when provinces with a higher incidence of insurgent actions and illegal narcotic activity receive more aid. Guehenno argued that the JCMB must become the centralized coordination mechanism if it is to be effective.

Guehenno on Afghan Elections

¶6. (SBU) Guehenno underscored that the upcoming elections are a top priority for UNAMA, and explained that a number of preparatory actions need to be taken now. The current outstanding issue is conducting voter registration prior to the onset of winter. He suggested that an appreciably lower voter turnout could damage the authority of the central government and the President. In response to a question, Guehenno said that postponing the elections is not a real option, as doing so would severely erode the legitimacy of the Presidency. At the same time, the risks of an ill-prepared election in which large portions of the population do not participate are clear. Guehenno called for a redoubling of efforts to facilitate successful elections.

EAD on Afghan Elections

¶7. (SBU) Deputy political counselor Phee met separately June 20 with EAD Director Jenness. Jenness outlined several legal and logistical challenges, but identified possible solutions and positively recalled the technical expertise of the Afghans. He acknowledged that the recent decision to de-link registration for a national identity card (civil registry) from voter registration could cause delays in voter registration, including the need to procure a new form,

Ramadan in September, and the onset of Afghan winter. Jenness said a two-phase voter registration in which the northern provinces register in the summer and the southern provinces register in the winter might be necessary. Referring to the ambiguous legal status of the Afghan electoral commission, Jenness noted that any amendment of Afghanistan's electoral law must be adopted one year prior to the election. He also raised a concern that the current Election Commissioner, who was appointed by Karzai, will be perceived as favoring the President. Jenness expressed confidence, however, that SRSG Eide and the international community could work in partnership with the Afghan government to tackle these matters.

18. (SBU) When apprised that Guehenno had expressed concerns to PermReps about the impact of lower voter turnout on the credibility of the results, Jenness explained that it is common in new democracies for there to be a dip in voter turnout in the second election. However, he shared Guehenno's concern that there be equable participation levels from Afghan's different ethnic groups, and suggested that the international community should work to prevent such a scenario. To that end, he recommended that EAD consult with State, USAID and other interested agencies. He said that UNAMA's recently appointed elections advisor will visit Washington in late July to attend an NDU conference on the elections, and suggested a meeting be arranged at that time. Jenness confirmed that the UN would mobilize necessary support for the elections, reporting that he had recently sent a member of his staff TDY to Afghanistan to assess and assist.

19. (SBU) Comment: Guehenno's pessimism about the situation in Afghanistan is consistent with his generally negative perspective about the situation there. End Comment.

Khalilzad